

EPA Desk Statement

EPA Issues Decision on the Spokane Tribe of Indians' Revised Water Quality Standards

Today, the EPA has approved a number of revised water quality standards adopted by the Spokane Tribe that set water quality goals to support a traditional subsistence lifestyle and are consistent with the federal Clean Water Act. The Clean Water Act requires that states and authorized tribes adopt water quality standards that define water quality goals for a waterbody by designating uses for the water and setting criteria necessary to protect those uses. EPA's decision recognizes the Spokane Tribe's inherent authority to set protective water quality goals that are consistent with the Clean Water Act and reflect tribal policies and priorities.

The Spokane Tribe's revisions include updated water quality criteria designed to protect people who practice a traditional subsistence lifestyle from exposure to toxic pollutants. The Tribe's decision to ensure that water quality is sufficient to support and protect traditional subsistence practices is fundamentally a question of tribal policy and is within its authority to determine the appropriate uses of its waters.

The Tribe estimated that subsistence fish consumption was approximately 865 grams per day. The Tribe established this rate based on historical and anthropological evidence about the quantities of fish consumed in practicing a traditional subsistence lifestyle on the Reservation and other factors that have affected the availability of fish (e.g., dam construction).